

Leek First School

Inspection report

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| Unique Reference Number | 124098 |
| Local Authority | Staffordshire |
| Inspection number | 328053 |
| Inspection date | 24 June 2009 |
| Reporting inspector | Susan Walsh |

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

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| Type of school | First |
| School category | Community |
| Age range of pupils | 5–9 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number on roll | |
| School (total) | 149 |
| Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS | 0 |
| Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years | 0 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Eric Hodgkinson |
| Headteacher | Kevin Allbutt |
| Date of previous school inspection | 23 May 2006 |
| Date of previous funded early education inspection | Not previously inspected |
| Date of previous childcare inspection | Not previously inspected |
| School address | East Street Leek ST13 6LF |
| Telephone number | 01538 483200 |
| Fax number | 01538 483203 |

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|--------------------------|--------------|
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors.

Description of the school

The school is smaller than most primary schools and the numbers on role have fallen in recent years. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is similar to the national average. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well below that found nationally. Few pupils are from minority ethnic groups. A number of senior leaders and class teachers have recently been absent from school. The school provides for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage through a single Reception class.

Key for inspection grades

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|---------|--------------|
| Grade 1 | Outstanding |
| Grade 2 | Good |
| Grade 3 | Satisfactory |
| Grade 4 | Inadequate |

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The school is providing a good standard of education. It is extremely effective at encouraging pupils' personal development and well-being. The high aspirations of the headteacher, combined with his unswerving belief in developing the talents and abilities of each and every child, has resulted in above average academic standards and pupils' outstanding personal development. When children join the school in the Reception class, they are ready to learn but their skills in language and communication are a little below those expected. By the time they leave at the end of Year 4, pupils have reached above average standards and their achievement is good. This is because of good teaching and learning. Parents have been understandably concerned about recent staff absence but this has been carefully managed to minimise the impact on pupils. Consequently, pupils have continued to make good progress during this difficult time.

Parents are very pleased with what the school offers. One parent commented, 'I feel the teachers manage the children well and balance work with fun.' This neatly sums up why pupils really enjoy coming to school. Their excellent enjoyment of school is reflected in above average attendance rates and their good behaviour. The outstanding attention paid to personal, social and health education ensures that pupils are exceptionally well informed about how to stay healthy and safe. Pupils take great pride in their school and are eager to take on responsibilities. They say: 'Everyone gets a chance.' The school council is very effective and does a lot of valuable work, for example carrying out research that informed improvements to the playground. Pupils find the star reward system highly motivating and strive to do well not only in their school work but also in the way they treat others, because they know that all their efforts will be fairly rewarded.

A good curriculum ensures that pupils are exceptionally well prepared for their next stage of education. Not only are their literacy and numeracy skills above average, they are confident and competent in their use of information and communication technology (ICT) and are able to work well with others. Carefully planned units of work that provide a bridge between the work completed in Year 4 and the work that pupils will complete in their new school help ensure smooth transition. Pastoral care is of a very high quality but academic guidance is only satisfactory. Pupils receive good guidance from teachers and support staff during lessons. However, there are inconsistencies in the quality of teachers' marking and academic target setting is not always used effectively. As a result, pupils are not always fully aware of how they can improve their work.

Parents, pupils and staff appreciate the headteacher's friendly and informal manner and his steadfast commitment to promoting equal opportunities. Teachers and support staff are hard working and committed and have improved their practice since the previous inspection. Leadership and management are good overall. However, much of the management in this small school is carried out by the headteacher and subject leaders and other middle managers have still to fully develop their skills, especially in monitoring and evaluation, and this restricts their ability to contribute fully to school improvement. Sustained improvements to standards and achievement demonstrate the school's good capacity for further improvement.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

The overall quality of provision is good, reflecting good leadership and management. Children enter the school with skills and knowledge that are slightly below those expected nationally. They have good attitudes to learning but their skills in language and communication are below those expected. They make good progress and by the time they join Year 1 their skills are above average in most areas of learning. However, boys' skills in communication, language and literacy are closer to the average whereas girls' skills are above average. The introduction of a programme that makes links between sounds and letters has boosted progress in reading and writing for all children. Children enjoy school and play happily with others. They are generally confident and have learnt to take turns and behave well. Parents typically comment that their children 'look forward to school every day'. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Staff ask challenging, open-ended questions that extend children's learning. The activities that are supported by adults are well planned and carefully evaluated. However, activities that children choose for themselves are not always as exciting and sometimes lack a clear purpose. The school is aware that the range of activities provided outdoors is fairly narrow and there are plans to make improvements. The quality of care and support is good. Relationships between staff and children are very supportive and parents say 'concerns are listened to and dealt with if needed'. They are right to be confident that their children are well cared for.

What the school should do to improve further

- Develop the skills of middle leaders, especially in monitoring and evaluating the school's work.
- Enhance teachers' marking and the use of academic targets so that pupils know exactly how to improve their work.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

When pupils join Year 1, their skills in reading, writing and calculation are broadly average. Pupils make good progress through Key Stage 1 and by the time they reach the end of Year 2 standards are above average in reading, writing and mathematics. The proportion of pupils who reach Level 3 is usually above average in both reading and writing but this year is likely to be closer to the national average in writing and mathematics. Girls often reach higher standards than boys but both boys and girls make good progress reflecting their individual starting points. Pupils continue to make good progress through Years 3 and 4. When they leave the school in Year 4, standards are above average in writing and mathematics and are particularly impressive in reading. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities also make good progress because they are well supported.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' social and moral development is outstanding but their spiritual and cultural development, while good, is not as strong. Although the school is at the heart of its local community and pupils are thoroughly involved in local culture, they have limited opportunities to directly experience other cultures and develop their understanding of cultural and faith diversity. Pupils' behaviour is good both in and out of lessons. By Year 4, pupils are already developing very

mature attitudes and provide excellent role models for younger children. Pupils feel extremely safe and secure. They are emphatic that there is no bullying in school, saying that there are 'only little squabbles' which are quickly resolved. Pupils make an excellent contribution to their school community by taking on a wide range of age-appropriate responsibilities. The school council has a big impact on decision making in the school and is committed to protecting the environment. Active fundraising demonstrates how the pupils are able to empathise with those who are less fortunate than themselves. Pupils develop an excellent commitment to healthy living. They make healthy choices of food and participate enthusiastically in sports and after-school clubs.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The pace of lessons has improved considerably since the previous inspection and many lessons are now lively and exciting. As a result, pupils are keen and eager to learn. Teachers' expectations can vary slightly but overall they are higher than at the time of the previous inspection. The match of work to pupils' needs is very good in some classes but in a minority of classes this is not the case. However, overall there is now greater clarity about what pupils are expected to learn and the measurement of pupils' progress. Resources, including ICT, are often used well to support learning.

Teaching assistants are very much part of the team and do a good job supporting pupils during the introduction of lessons and when pupils are working independently. Teachers provide very good opportunities for pupils to work together in pairs and groups and this contributes to their outstanding personal development.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Good attention is paid to developing pupils' basic skills, including their use of ICT, and this is reflected in their good academic achievement. The national strategies for literacy and numeracy have been fully implemented. The school is aware that the curriculum does not fully promote the development of literacy, numeracy and ICT skills across subjects through the creative use of topics. The programme for personal and social education and circle times ensures that pupils have ample opportunities to express their feelings and start to understand the experiences of others. Much is done to enrich the curriculum. There is good involvement in local events such as the carnival and memorial marches. Visitors and visits, including a residential for older pupils, are used well to bring learning alive. There are a good range of clubs and extensive opportunities for sport. Specialist teaching in physical education further enhances the good provision for sport.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Excellent pastoral care contributes extensively to pupils' enjoyment of school and their outstanding personal development. The school is a very caring community where relationships between adults and pupils are very good indeed. Consequently, pupils feel respected and secure. Safeguarding requirements are met. Parents say 'Teachers have been very approachable if there have been any concerns'. Vulnerable pupils, including those with additional learning needs or

emotional and behavioural issues, are sensitively supported and this effective support is enhanced by good links with external agencies. Pupils' progress is carefully checked and those at risk of underachieving are spotted quickly and offered additional help. Although pupils often receive good advice about how to improve their work during lessons, this is not always followed up by the effective marking of pupils' work. There is some good marking, but more commonly it is congratulatory and does not provide pupils, particularly the more able, with sufficient information about how to produce better work. Targets are not always referred to in lessons or in teachers' marking.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Good leadership and management has raised standards, accelerated pupils' achievement and secured pupils' outstanding personal development. However, recent unavoidable staff absences have slowed developments, particularly of the curriculum. Although the headteacher has a very clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school, leaders at other levels are not as actively involved in monitoring, evaluation and driving forward improvements. The school works very well with parents, the local community and professional partners to promote pupils' well-being. The active participation in the local pyramid of schools and learning networks has made a significant contribution to pupils' successful transition to the middle school. The school has a thorough understanding of its local community and is determined to break down local barriers and raise aspirations. However, its contribution to community cohesion is only satisfactory because pupils have limited opportunities to meet pupils from different backgrounds to themselves. Governors are very supportive and are conscientious about fulfilling their duties. However, as yet, they do not always provide sufficient challenge.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

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| Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate | School Overall |
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Overall effectiveness

| | |
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| How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners? | 2 |
| Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection | Yes |
| How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being? | 2 |
| The capacity to make any necessary improvements | 2 |

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

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|---|---|
| How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS? | 2 |
| How well do children in the EYFS achieve? | 2 |
| How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS? | 2 |
| How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop? | 2 |
| How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted? | 2 |
| How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed? | 2 |

Achievement and standards

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|--|---|
| How well do learners achieve? | 2 |
| The standards ¹ reached by learners | 2 |
| How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners | 2 |
| How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress | 2 |

¹Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Personal development and well-being

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|---|---|
| How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners? | 1 |
| The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development | 2 |
| The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles | 1 |
| The extent to which learners adopt safe practices | 1 |
| The extent to which learners enjoy their education | 1 |
| The attendance of learners | 2 |
| The behaviour of learners | 2 |
| The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community | 1 |
| How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being | 1 |

The quality of provision

| | |
|--|---|
| How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs? | 2 |
| How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners? | 2 |
| How well are learners cared for, guided and supported? | 2 |

Leadership and management

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| How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners? | 2 |
| How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education | 2 |
| How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards | 2 |
| The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation | 2 |
| How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated | 2 |
| How well does the school contribute to community cohesion? | 3 |
| How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money | 2 |
| The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities | 3 |
| Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements? | Yes |
| Does this school require special measures? | No |
| Does this school require a notice to improve? | No |

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

25 June 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Leek First School, Leek, ST13 6LF

It was a delight and a privilege to visit your school. The inspection team really enjoyed talking to you all and listened very carefully to what you had to say. You go to a good school that has some outstanding features. It's clear that you have a good time at school because of all the fun things you get to do. We enjoyed listening to you talk about the good work done by the school council. We loved the trendy new colours you have chosen for the new girls' toilets, and the boys' toilets look like they are going to be just as nice. We thought you were very well informed about how to keep healthy and safe and were very impressed by your success in sports tournaments. What a lot of trophies you have in the school foyer! Your behaviour is good. You have good manners and make visitors very welcome indeed. We think that you all make a really important contribution to your school.

Children get off to a good start in the Reception class and older children also told us that they find learning fun. You are all making good progress and by the end of Year 4 you are reaching standards that are above those reached by other children in schools nationally. Your teachers work very hard and teaching is good. Teachers give you lots of help during your lessons but we have asked them to improve the way they mark your books and use targets so you know exactly how to improve your work. You told us that the staff look after you very well and we agree.

The people who run your school are working hard to make it a better place. We have asked your teachers to improve their management skills so that they can work together to make your school even better. I wish you well for the future.

Yours faithfully

Susan Walsh

Lead inspector